

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 099107

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, ET, US

SUBJ: ETHIOPIAN CHARGE MEKBIB'S CALL ON ASSISTANT
SECRETARY SCHAUFLE

1. ETHIOPIAN CHARGE MEKBIB, WHO RETURNED WASHINGTON APRIL 27, MET AT HIS REQUEST FOR 45 MINUTES WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFLE ON APRIL 30. MAIN PURPOSE OF MEKBIB'S CALL WAS TO ENCOURAGE USG NOT TO "OVERREACT" IN RESPONSE TO LATEST EPMG ACTIONS. IN HIS VIEW, AN OVERREACTION BY US WOULD RISK LOSING THE TRUST OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE, WHOM HE IS SURE RETAIN DEEP-SEATED GOOD FEELINGS TOWARDS USG AND AMERICAN PEOPLE. IN FACT, POPULAR REACTION TO CLOSURE OF US FACILITIES WAS ONE OF DISAPPOINTMENT. RE-STRESSING THAT IT WAS HIS PERSONAL VIEW, MEKBIB POINTED OUT THAT PRESENT POWER STRUCTURE IN ETHIOPIA IS FLUID AND WE SHOULD NOT TAKE STEPS WHICH COULD DAMAGE OUR STANDING WITH A SUCCESSOR REGIME. MEKBIB DESCRIBED HOW
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BATTLE HAS BEEN GOING ON IN DIRG FOR OVER TWO YEARS BETWEEN RADICALS WHO FAVOR COMMUNIST BLOC AND MODERATES WHO FAVOR CONTINUING CLOSE TIES WITH US. NOW THAT RADICALS HAVE WON, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT RUN, SOVIETS ARE WORKING HARD TO REPLACE THE USG. MEKBIB THOUGHT THAT US TEMPORIZING ON ARMS DELIVERIES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS HAD BEEN A CRITICAL FACTOR IN HELPING RADICALS ASSUME

DOMINANCE. RADICAL LEADERSHIP SEES WEST AS MAJOR THREAT TO CONTINUATION IN POWER AND IS VERY SENSITIVE TO ANY CRITICISM FROM WEST, AND PARTICULARLY USG, WHICH THEY HAVE NOW COMPLETELY WRITTEN OFF AS AN UNRELIABLE ARMS SUPPLIER.

2. IN RESPONSE TO MEKBIB'S QUESTION ON FUTURE OF OUR RELATIONS, ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFEELE SAID THAT NO DECISION HAS YET BEEN MADE BUT THAT WE WOULD BE REVIEWING THE MATTER CAREFULLY. THE ARMS RELATIONSHIP IS, OF COURSE, THE MOST DIFFICULT ELEMENT. EPMG ABROGATION OF OUR AGREEMENTS SUGGESTS THAT EPMG WISHES BRING MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH US TO AN END. IN ANY CASE, CONGRESS WOULD QUESTION CONTINUED ARMS SUPPLIES NOW THAT THE MAAG HAS BEEN CLOSED. MEKBIB SAID HE DID NOT KNOW HIS GOVERNMENT'S EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING FURTHER ARMS SUPPLIES. THE MOST RADICAL OF THE DIRG MEMBERS WILL BE HOPING THAT THE US WILL TAKE SOME ACTION WHICH WILL JUSTIFY THEIR MOVES AGAINST THE US IN THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE, WHO SEE NO VALUE TO ETHIOPIA IN ENDING A DECADES-LONG CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US. HE IMPLIED THAT TERMINATION OF PIPELINE ITEMS MIGHT PROVIDE THE RADICALS IN THE DIRG WITH THE JUSTIFICATION THEY SEEK SINCE "THE PEOPLE" ALREADY QUESTION THE NEED FOR A POOR COUNTRY LIKE ETHIOPIA TO SPEND \$300 MILLION FOR ARMS IN PAST FEW YEARS. IF THROUGH US ACTIONS THAT EXPENSE IS NOW SEEN TO HAVE BEEN A COMPLETE WASTE, IT WILL DAMAGE THE US IMAGE AMONG PEOPLE NOW FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO THE US.

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3. COMMENT; MEKBIB'S MAIN REASON FOR CALLING WAS CLEARLY TO PRESENT HIS OWN PERSONAL MESSAGE THAT WE NOT OVERREACT, A POINT WHICH HE DID NOT FURTHER DEFINE. AS HE SEES IT, USG SHOULD GIVE PARAMOUNT CONSIDERATION TO SALVAGING WHAT WE CAN OF OUR GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY AGAINST THE LIKELIHOOD THAT A NEW, MORE MODERATE GOVERNMENT MAY COME TO POWER WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME FRAME.

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